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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 180 (2015) 958 – 965

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**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

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The 6th International Conference Edu World 2014 “Education Facing Contemporary World Issues”, 7th - 9th November 2014

## Online procedures for quality assurance in implementation of life-long training program for mentors and assistance for debutant teaching professionals

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### Abstract

This paper aims at presenting a quality assurance operational procedure in implementation of life-long training of 400 Romanian teaching professionals in pre-university education on professional insertion mentoring professionals developed in the framework of the SOPHRD project “From debut to success”, 36525ID.

The described operational procedure includes indicators based on which it was measured in what weight the above-mentioned program stimulated full involvement of the trainees and promoted a reflexive, active and interactive pedagogy.

The outcomes indicate positive appreciations. A very high percentage of trainees appreciated that during program implementation they felt intellectually involved in a very high and high weight.

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Peer-review under responsibility of The Association “Education for tomorrow” / [Asociația “Educație pentru maine”].

**Keywords:** life-long training program for mentors and assistance for the debutant teaching professionals, quality of program implementation, quality assurance operational procedure, reflexive, active and interactive pedagogy

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### 1. Paper Rationale

This paper aims at presenting the legal, general and practical framework for mentoring and the findings of a research conducted in the framework of the SOPHRD project “FROM DEBUT TO SUCCESS” – a national professional insertion mentoring program for teaching professionals, ID 36525.

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The national professional insertion mentoring program for teaching professionals implemented in the framework of the SOPHRD project “FROM DEBUT TO SUCCESS” – a national professional insertion mentoring program for teaching professionals, ID 36525, and accredited to be implemented during a four-year period by the Department for Training for a Teaching Profession and Social Sciences – Humanities, Polytechnic University of Bucharest, aims at ensuring a systemic continuity between initial and life-long learning of the debutant teaching professionals, thus contributing to the human resource development in education. Project duration was three years and it was completed in May 2014.

By promoting inter-institutional partnership, the positive experiences in the educational field from the past years of the state institutions, agencies and non-governmental organizations are valued.

The target group is formed by teaching professionals in pre-university education. The training program is part of the “Professional development programs in line with the policies and strategies of the Ministry of National Education” category, education type is blended learning, allocated number of hours is 90, and the proposed number of professional transferable credits (ECTS) is 25.

By implementing this program it is aimed at mentors’ theoretical and practical training to monitor and provide advice to debutant teaching professionals for effective socio-professional integration in order to facilitate their professional and personal development.

It is also aimed at creating a modern, flexible and inclusive national assistance and support system for the debutant teaching professionals in pre-university education by training a pool of certified professional insertion mentors.

By their activity, professional insertion mentors contribute to the legitimacy and improvement of the approaches of debutant teaching professionals from urban and rural areas and implicitly motivate them in performing the teaching profession.

Through its goal and objectives, the training program observes both the European legal provisions in the field and national regulations in force and it is in line with medium and long-term strategies for education development set forth by the Ministry of National Education.

The program responds to an objective curricular need to elaborate support curriculum elements in the circumstances when Romania has legislation in force referring to implementation of a professional insertion mentoring system and it is proposed in a favorable educational and legal context from the point of view of its long-run goals, when there is a tendency to introduce the specific mentoring competences as a professional criterion for evaluation and career advancement of the teaching professionals. (SOPHRD, 57, 1.3., 36.525, 2013)

As concerns the survey conducted in the framework of the project and presented in this article, one of the online quality assurance procedures for the training of mentoring teaching professionals will be presented below. This refers to promotion of a reflexive-interactive model and a reflexive-interactive pedagogy that is based on a complete activation of the trainees from intellectual, emotional-motivational and psychic-motor points of view.

It is to be mentioned that within one of the project activities referring to application of the quality assurance procedures in implementation of the training program for professional insertion mentors, operational procedures and instruments have been developed to assure the quality of the training program implementation. Their elaboration and application started from the prerequisite that the attributes of the program may be identified both during the implementation process and subsequently in the effective activity of the social insertion mentors trained within this program.

## **2. Paper theoretical foundation and related literature**

In Romania, the training of mentors for the initial stage in teaching is currently conducted by attending life-long training programs. The access to these programs is conditional based on criteria related to education and

experience acquired in teaching. It is equally important to have passed previous steps related to career evolution (didactic grades, other training stages, etc.).

The training programs for mentors for the initial stage in teaching aim at training and/or developing competences related to documentation, pedagogical, psycho-social, management of the educational group, professional-scientific, technological, evaluation, career management and personal development. (L. Ezechil, coordinator, 2013)

Professional insertion concept refers to integration process of a young debutant or a new employee in the professional field for which he/she received specific training. (L. Ezechil, coordinator, 2013)

Improving professional insertion of the teaching professionals presumes that this process is successful enough, such as to provide performing teaching professionals for the education system from the debut in the teaching career and, on the other hand, to ensure their retention in the system. The support during the initial stage in teaching assumes a set of behaviors of the mentors, management of school unit, teaching colleagues in general that could lead to debutant teaching professional's integration and his/her retention in the school unit.

National Education Law no. 1/2011 stipulates in article 236(1) c, that initial stage in teaching is part of initial training: every teaching professional should pass through a practical stage that lasts one school year in an education unit, under the coordination of a teaching professional mentor. It is also to be noticed that National Education Law no. 1/2011 provides for in article 247(i) the position of teaching professional mentor in education units in order to provide initial training and professional insertion of the teaching professionals. Based on the provisions of article 248, para. (2) of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, the body of teaching professional mentors in Romania was established in Romania beginning with September 2011 to coordinate the practical stage with a view to take up a teaching profession.

The body of teaching professional mentors has been established as per the provisions of the Order of the Minister of Education no. 5485 of 29 September 2011 for the approval of the Methodology for the establishment of the body of teaching professional mentors to coordinate the practical stage with a view to take up a teaching profession. The access to the body of teaching professional mentors is given based on a competition that consists of fulfilling minimum conditions as concerns experience and knowledge acquired during the life-long training process and a practical test. Teaching professionals who are teaching professional mentors and are part of the body of teaching professional mentors have less teaching classes by two classes a week or they are extra remunerated for the mentoring time. By establishing the body of teaching professional mentors it is aimed at filling the need of support teaching professionals for the teaching professionals in the initial teaching stage at national level. (National Education Law no. 1/2011)

Although the legal framework for support in the initial stage in teaching is relatively new in Romania, it is important to be mentioned that in the Romanian education system there are theoretical and practical experiences as concerns mentoring activity. In this respect, several national and international projects have been implemented in the past years: UNISCHOOL and then PRESETT/Pre-service Teacher Education, NQT/Support for Newly Qualified Teachers, MOSS/Mentor Observation and Support Scheme, START, etc. Studies and research have been conducted, the authors in the field of educational sciences having substantial contributions in this direction.

As concerns the legal framework and mentoring implementation in different European countries, several characteristics will be referred to hereafter.

The final step in teachers' training, the in-service training, that is found in some European education systems may be considered as a transition phase between the initial training periods in the universities and entering the teaching profession as a qualified teacher. This step, generically called initial stage, is characterized by a strong professional support and a continuing supervision by experienced mentors (tutors). The teaching professional is not fully qualified yet and this is why (s)he is still called candidate or trainee, although (s)he has already carried out numerous teaching activities in the classroom. This type of training that belongs to initial training step is present in many European countries: Germany, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Austria, Scotland, The

Netherlands, England, Cyprus, and Slovenia. However, in the education systems in other countries there is a two-three years transition period when the young debutant teaching professional does not get the status of permanently appointed teacher, but it gets it by fulfilling certain criteria regarding the quality of his/her teaching activity and by passing different types of tests. This happens in Greece, Spain, and Italy. Almost half of the European countries provide for the new teachers a certain type of support during the first teaching year. In the schooling systems, there are provisions for the transfer from teachers' initial training to the effective professional activity. For example, programs duration varies from seven months to two years. In most countries, teaching professional mentors, often in cooperation with school principals or other experienced teaching professionals, deals with settlement of the debutant teaching professionals. Experienced teaching professionals invested as tutors (mentors, trainers, counselors, coordinators) are in charge with providing support for the candidates from three points of view: training for the teaching activity; getting acquainted and adapting to the school environment; monitoring and evaluation of the candidates' teaching activity.

Therefore, efforts of the education systems in many countries are observed to facilitate transition of the future teachers to the full professional activity. (L. Șerbănescu, 2011)

In a generic sense, improving the quality of education means evaluation, analysis, continuous corrective and regulatory action from education provider, the unit, institution that provides education services based on selecting and adopting the most suitable procedures and instruments and by observing the reference standards.

In terms of education legislation, the quality of education is a set of characteristics of a study program or a professional qualification program and of the provider by means of which are met quality standards, as well as the expectations of the beneficiaries. In defining quality in education and teaching, six major orientations with independent, but mostly cumulative presence are outlined at the level of the school unit and they refer to: excellence, process, product, standard, satisfaction of the beneficiaries and cost-benefit.

In line with the recent curricular philosophies, national and international regulations, a very relevant dimension in the implementation of the program this article refers to was, as mentioned above, elaboration and application of quality assurance procedures in implementation of the training program for social insertion mentors.

In this respect, a quality assurance system for the program has been developed starting from two categories of complementary prerequisites for the training program: general and specific. The general prerequisites are, on one hand, the policies and strategies related to quality in education that are correlated with the values and guidelines promoted at the level of modernity of the European standards and, on the other hand, the parameters considered as significant in evaluating quality in education and teaching: functionality in meeting the specified attributes; effectiveness – probability of easy functioning according to the standards; preventive and corrective maintenance; utility; esthetic form; effectiveness in exploitation; health, genetic and environment-related properties; rational consumption; properties – technical-economic indicators etc. Associated to these, it has been outlined as operational the functionality of three categories of indicators: internal (human resources and materials, processes, curricula, school life); related to relevance (utility, impact upon needs, autonomy, responsibility, competences, participation in education, integration on the labour market); related to interface (psychological, social, satisfaction, visibility, partnership aspects). The specific prerequisites of the training program have been, on one hand, the attributes/qualities of the program that can be identified both during the implementation process and subsequently in the effective activity of the mentor for professional insertion trained within this program, respectively in the mentoring services provided and, on the other hand, the concrete product provided by the training program equally represented by acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes that in mentoring practice will be the proof of the acquired competences.

### 3. Methodology

An internal evaluation of the training program quality has been envisaged by a multiple criteria examination of the weight in which the training provider and the program meet the reference standards. Thus, having in view the above-mentioned prerequisites the quality assurance procedures and instruments for the training program have been organized in two main categories, as follows: the system of procedures to assure the quality of the training program for professional insertion mentors – that includes quality assurance procedures for the key dimensions of the training program considered as systemic, as a support curriculum element and as a curricular product for training a pool of professional insertion mentors, and the system of procedures for quality assurance in the activity of social insertion mentors – that includes operational procedures and the axes of reference for these procedures used by mentors in their direct relation with debutant teaching professionals with a view to assure the quality of the mentoring activity.

A quantitative presentation of the quality assurance procedures conceived and applied for the training program is made in Table 1.

Table 1. Number and nature of the quality assurance procedures for the training program

Total number of procedures	Number of compulsory procedures		Number of optional procedures
16	8		8
	Face to face (pen-paper)	Online	
	3	5	

One of the online quality assurance procedures for the training program that is based on questionnaire survey as a research method applied to a sample of 50 trainees from the Training Centre in Bucharest is presented below.

The reference standard is related to promotion of a reflexive-interactive model and of a reflexive-interactive pedagogy that means making the trainees fully active from intellectual, emotional-motivational and psycho-motor points of view.

The operational procedure includes the following items: In what weight has the trainees' reflexivity been encouraged? In what weight has the intellectual interactivity of the trainees with the learned material and work tasks been encouraged? In what weight has been encouraged trainees' interaction with peers (intellectual, social and emotional exchanges)? In what weight has been encouraged trainees' interaction with a teaching professional trainer (intellectual, social and emotional exchanges)? In what weight has been practiced an active and interactive pedagogy? In what weight have you been intellectually involved in program implementation? In what weight have you been emotionally and motivationally involved in program implementation? In what weight have you been involved from psycho-motor point of view in program implementation? In what weight do you agree with the professional training model promoted by the program? In what weight do you agree with the pedagogical paradigm promoted by the program?

The following weights have been considered: very low, low, moderate, high, very high.

The applicant of this procedure was Partner 1 in the project – Polytechnic University of Bucharest by posting it on the project platform.

Moment of application: at the end of the project.

Way of interpretation and data analysis: the corresponding percentage was calculated for each item, for each of the five categories of answers (weight: very low, low, moderate, high, very high).

#### 4. Findings

Synthetic presentation of the findings is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Findings

No.	Items	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	In what weight has the trainees' reflexivity been encouraged?	Very high	16	32.0	32.0	32.0
		High	28	56.0	56.0	88.0
		Moderate	6	12.0	12.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
2	In what weight has the intellectual interactivity of the trainees with the learned material and work tasks been encouraged?	Very low	1	2.0	2.0	46.0
		High	21	42.0	42.0	88.0
		Moderate	6	12.0	12.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
3	In what weight has been encouraged trainees' interaction with peers (intellectual, social and emotional exchanges)?	Very high	24	48.0	48.0	48.0
		Very low	1	2.0	2.0	50.0
		High	19	38.0	38.0	88.0
		Low	1	2.0	2.0	90.0
		Moderate	5	10.0	10.0	100.0
4	In what weight has been encouraged trainees' interaction with a teaching professional trainer (intellectual, social and emotional exchanges)?	Very high	21	42.0	42.0	42.0
		Very low	1	2.0	2.0	44.0
		High	24	48.0	48.0	92.0
		Moderate	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
5	In what weight has been practiced an active and interactive pedagogy?	Very high	22	44.0	44.0	44.0
		Very low	1	2.0	2.0	46.0
		High	24	48.0	48.0	94.0
		Moderate	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
6	In what weight have you been intellectually involved in program implementation?	Very high	26	52.0	52.0	52.0
		Very low	1	2.0	2.0	54.0
		High	19	38.0	38.0	92.0
		Moderate	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
7	In what weight have you been emotionally and motivationally involved in program implementation?	Very high	23	46.0	46.0	46.0
		Very low	1	2.0	2.0	48.0
		High	20	40.0	40.0	88.0
		Low	1	2.0	2.0	90.0
		Moderate	5	10.0	10.0	100.0
8	In what weight have you been involved from psycho-motor point of view in program implementation?	Very high	15	30.0	30.0	30.0
		High	19	38.0	38.0	68.0
		Low	1	2.0	2.0	70.0
		Moderate	15	30.0	30.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
9	In what weight do you agree with the professional training model promoted by the program?	Very high	20	40.0	40.0	40.0
		Very low	1	2.0	2.0	42.0
		High	23	46.0	46.0	88.0
		Low	1	2.0	2.0	90.0
		Moderate	5	10.0	10.0	100.0
10	In what weight do you agree with the	Total	50	100.0	100.0	
		Very high	21	42.0	42.0	42.0

pedagogical paradigm promoted by the program?	High	25	50.0	50.0	92.0
	Low	1	2.0	2.0	94.0
	Moderate	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

## 5. Discussions

Over 80% of trainees have appreciated the fact that the program stimulated and encouraged trainees' reflexivity both from cognitive and meta-cognitive perspective in a very high and high weight; 42% of trainees appreciated that the program encouraged in a very high and high weight the intellectual interaction of trainees with the learned material and work tasks; 48% of trainees appreciated that the program encouraged in a very high weight and 38% in a high weight intellectual interaction of the trainees with their peers, respectively intellectual, social and emotional exchanges; 42% of the trainees appreciated the fact that the program encouraged in a very high weight and 48% in a high weight intellectual interaction of trainees with the teaching professionals who acted as trainers, respectively intellectual, social and emotional exchanges between them; over 44% of the trainees appreciated that program application involved the use of an active and interactive pedagogy in a very high weight and 48% in a high weight; 52% of trainees appreciated that during program implementation they felt intellectually involved in a very high weight; 46% of trainees appreciated that during program implementation they felt emotionally and motivationally involved in a very high weight and 40% in a high weight; over 60% of trainees appreciated that during program implementation they were involved from psycho-motor point of view in a very high and high weight.

A very high percentage of trainees – over 80% - adhered in a very high and high weight to the professional training model promoted by the program, a model that was considered as appropriate for the Romanian educational and legal context; over 90% of trainees agreed with the pedagogical paradigm promoted by the program in a very high and high weight.

## 6. Conclusions

The findings of this survey lead to encouraging conclusions as concerns perception and participants' degree of satisfaction. They have become aware that their involvement in program implementation has been total – intellectual/cognitive, emotional-motivational and psycho-motor, respectively that an active pedagogy has been employed. At the same time, due to the fact that ensuring interactivity was a methodological priority of the team of trainers, the trainees had opportunities to have intellectual, oral, socio-emotional interactions with the teaching professional, trainers and curricular contents by applying an interactive pedagogy. Thus, the special relevance of both frontal and group interactive activities has been often mentioned by participants during face-to-face discussions and on the platform forum and chat, as well as in the instruments for monitoring program implementation they have filled in.

It is to be noticed that the professional training model the program is based on has been appreciated by the trainees as being in line with their professional training needs and with current trends in life-long learning of the teaching professionals and mentoring. This model turns to the best account a modern pedagogic paradigm whose key elements are: cognitive and meta-cognitive reflexion, stimulation and interactivity.

It is obvious that, at all training levels, active and interactive pedagogy encourages those who participate in trainings to become responsible and self-responsible, develop self-control and confidence in their own knowledge and training potential. Due to their efforts and total involvement (intellectual/cognitive, emotional-motivational and psycho-motor), those who educate themselves develop their cognitive and educational autonomy.

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